

Getting There

News from the Blue Ribbon Commission
on Transportation
Spring 1999



What's the Problem?

Some of us don't think about transportation very much, except when something goes wrong: a bumpy ride over a poorly maintained road, there is a traffic tie-up on the free-way, the bus hasn't come after you've been waiting for 40 minutes. Transportation is fundamentally about getting there, and getting there in good time and with a minimum of hassle. Yet it is much more than that; beyond the transportation systems we use every day —roads, bridges, ferries, buses, trains, and sidewalks — lies another set of systems that can greatly affect how transportation works. We're talking about the way planning is done for transportation, how quickly or slowly projects can get built, how priorities are set and who sets them, how roads are maintained, and where the money comes from to do all of this. It's also about policies that determine how land is used and developed, rapid population growth, and travel behavior that keeps our roads busy all day long.

A BIGGER PICTURE

The Blue Ribbon Commission is charged with taking an overview of all aspects of transportation in Washington and recommending changes over a twenty-year period that can improve the way transportation is funded, the way and the kinds of projects that are built, basic administrative and governance structures, as well as improved practices that have been shown to be successful in other places.



Getting there isn't half the fun anymore — it's part of the problem.

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Who we are

AN INDEPENDENT BODY

The Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation was formed by the Washington State Legislature for the purpose of taking a broad look at Washington's transportation needs, priorities, funding, policies, and practices. We are an independent body of 42 members representing a cross-section of statewide transportation-related interests. We are not affiliated with the Washington State Department of Transportation or the Washington Transportation Commission.

The Blue Ribbon Commission is looking at new ways of doing business in Washington. Our goal is not to change things overnight, but to recommend changes for a twenty-year period that will result in a better quality of life and a continued strong economy for our state.

OUR COMMITTEES

Our commission is comprised of three committees, each dealing with a focused set of topics. The Administration Committee will recommend structural improvements, and policy and practical changes that could contribute to solutions to transportation problems. The Revenue Committee will recommend realistic, achievable funding plans and programs for transportation. The Investment Committee will evaluate transportation priorities and recommend critical investments, recommend changes to planning practices, and recommend strategies that reduce demand as well as those that increase capacity.

Who we've heard from

To date, the Commission has heard presentations from the following people:

Ron Anderson, David Evans and Associates, described Washington's transportation structure and governance; **Jerry Bryant**, Stevens County Dept. of Public Works, outlined a county TIP and prioritization process; **Don Cairns**, City of Redmond, talked about city transportation planning; **Paula Hammond**, WSDOT, told how highway construction projects are programmed and prioritized; **Laird Harris**, Laird Harris Public Affairs, discussed transportation and public opinion.

Charles Howard, WSDOT, spoke on the state transportation plan; **Dean Lookingbill**, Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council, described a regional planning and development process; **Harry Reinert**, Land Use Study Commission, talked about land use and regulatory reform; **Brian Ziegler**, WSDOT, presented WSDOT's project development process; **Steve Excell**, Paragon, outlined issues relevant to the transportation funding process; **Willy Gorrissen**, Pierce Transit, described state transit funding.

Bob Gregory, Cities of Kelso and Longview, spoke on city transportation funding and budgeting; **Glenn Miles**, Spokane Regional Council, described federal transportation funding; **Helga Morgenstern**, WSDOT, discussed state transportation funding and budgeting; **Randall Pozdena**, ECONorthwest, presented causes and possible solutions to traffic congestion; **Craig Stone**, WSDOT, compared two recent highway construction projects; **Harold Taniguchi**, King County DOT, described King County's future transportation challenges; **Tarek Hatata**, Booz, Allen, & Hamilton, described transportation performance measures. **Bill Eager**, TDA; **Aaron Ostrom**, Transportation Choices Coalition; and **Scott Rutherford**, University of Washington, participated in a panel discussion on measuring transportation system performance.

Talk to us

If you have a point of view or information you think we should hear, please contact the Blue Ribbon Commission. Our address, telephone number, E-mail address, and website are listed on the back page.

The Problem continued from page 1

For the past six months, the Commission has been defining the issues and topics that we will be working on over the next eighteen months. Here are some of them:

Governance and Permitting

With over 500 entities directly involved in transportation programs in Washington State, and no single entity in charge, there are issues regarding how the entire transportation system is run and who is accountable. The Administration Committee is going to ask and answer questions, such as:

ACCOUNTABILITY AND EFFICIENCY

What is the extent of administrative inefficiencies? How does Washington compare with other state governments? How much do regulations add to the cost of projects? Are there potential overhead savings? Opportunities for contracting out?

FRAGMENTATION

Where is there overlap in the planning process? What have we learned from previous consolidation attempts? Are there models of regional government that may make sense for transportation projects? What lessons can we learn from other states and countries?

PERMITTING

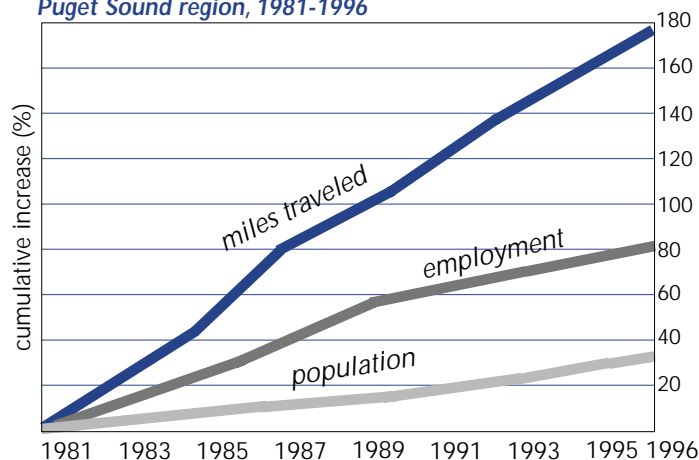
Is there a way of simplifying the 'maze' of permitting requirements? How can the BRCT support or extend WSDOT's reinventing NEPA effort?

Funding

Funding for transportation projects comes from a complicated assortment of taxes. Our Revenue Committee expects to make realistic recommendations that improve on that financing mechanism, looking at issues such as:

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POPULATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND DRIVING
Puget Sound region, 1981-1996



More people, more jobs, and more driving than ever.

(Source: WSDOT)



CURRENT FINANCING AND TAXATION

How are taxes collected and distributed now? Are there opportunities for simplification or restructuring?

LOCAL FUNDING

How are gas taxes distributed to cities and counties? What are the problems with this formula, and what are potential solutions? How can local funding sources be maximized? Can statewide transportation funding be improved?

OTHER FUNDING MECHANISMS

How can market mechanisms be used in transportation projects? Do tolls or congestion pricing make sense in Washington? Are there opportunities for public-private financing? Where are the areas for new revenues?

Priorities and Investment

The Investment Committee will recommend critical investments in our transportation system,

and strategies that make the best use of the existing system.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

What are the best practices to help us separate needs from wants? Is there a project prioritization process that evaluates projects across jurisdictional boundaries?

CONGESTION

How much capacity can be added to the existing system? Where are the opportunities for HOV lanes and toll lanes? Where can we make transit investments?

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LAND USE

What is transportation's appropriate role in economic development? What are the trade-offs between mobility and economic growth? How should land use and transportation planning be coordinated?

Where we're going

Here's a roadmap of our upcoming work:

April – September 1999

Develop preliminary benchmarks and recommendations. Commissioners will hold a retreat in September.

November – December 1999

Adopt preliminary recommendations.

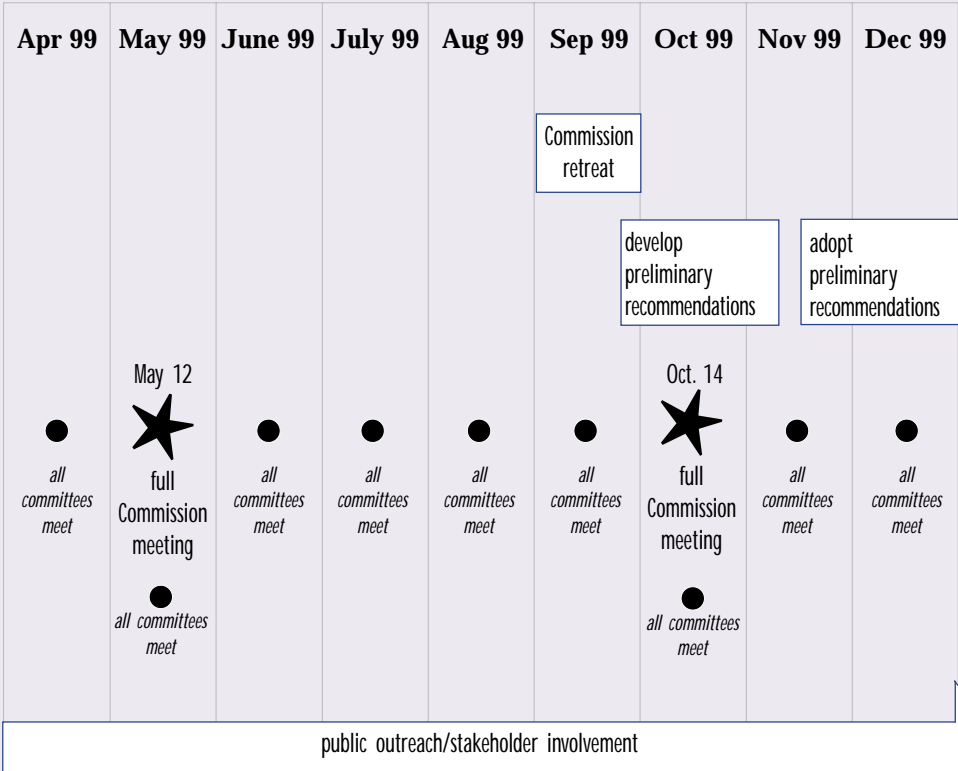
January – December 2000

Town meetings and discussions statewide to gather comments on preliminary recommendations.

April – June 2000

Revise recommendations based upon what we heard at our discussions.

BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION 1999 CALENDAR



For more information

If you would like more information about the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation, here is how to reach us:

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